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Chapter 3

Out in 'The Open' with Georges Braque and Saint-John Perse:

L'Ordre des oiseaux

Neil Cox

> What birds plunge through is not the intimate space
> in which you see all forms intensified.
> (Out in the Open, you would be denied
> your self, would disappear into that vastness.)[1]

The French poet Saint-John Perse was first introduced to the painter Georges Braque on 26 November 1958 in the artist's Paris studio. This was three years after the German philosopher Martin Heidegger had made a special trip to see Braque at his home and studio in Varengeville, Normandy, in the company of Jean Beaufret. It was the latter meeting, recorded in a photograph that I find faintly comic (fig. 3.1) and that first set me thinking about the possible relationships between these two moderns, the philosopher and the artist. This chapter develops an essay in which I identified resonances between Heidegger's thinking and Braque's painting. My aim is to question the bringing together of two life-long projects that were realized in different

[1] From an uncollected poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, written in Muzot, 16 June 1924, and translated in Rilke, *Ahead of all Parting, The Selected Poetry and Prose of Rainer Maria Rilke*, (trans.) Stephen Mitchell (New York, 1995, p.173). This essay is a revised version of a paper presented at the 36th Annual Conference of the Association of Art Historians, University of Glasgow, 15–17th April 2010. I am very grateful to Amanda Boetzkes and Aron Vinegar for inviting me to participate in their session on 'Heidegger and the Work of Art History', and to the audience, in particular Diamuid Costello and Phillip Tonner, for their comments.

cultural spheres and in different forms.[2] Writing mostly about Braque's remarkable *Studio* series of the early 1950s (e.g. *Atelier VI*, Fondation Maeght, St Paul de Vence), I tried, in my earlier essay, to read their dense and complex surfaces in relation to Heidegger's descriptions of 'the ontological difference' between Being and beings. This difference, in brief, is between what Heidegger terms an 'unconcealing' or disclosure (the un- or the dis- that opens up, that allows every thing that *is* to appear, to be present) and the concealing or closure that is its presencing, the ground of grounds. Sometimes Heidegger expresses this difference in terms of the way light makes things emerge for us out of the dark, where the lightening of things makes things themselves seem all that there is, and where the darkness around them, which metaphorically speaking is like the concealing or closure that is Being, recedes from our everyday attention. To make the basis of the translation from existential phenomenology to modern painting viable, I played with Heidegger's metaphorical and eminently visual language of the seeming positivity of things and the elusive negative of space, a struggle between, and co-dependence of, light and shadow in beings which is a clue to the meaning of Being. I tried to draw the two projects together in the terrain of poetry. Neither was a poet, but both in their later years privileged poetry, or the making that is poeticizing, as a form of thinking: Heidegger for its potential to point to the truth of Being anew at what he believed was the darkest hour for humanity; Braque for its ability to free the mind from objects, to draw attention instead to their relations, the 'in-between'.[3] In passing from beings (or 'objects') to the medium of their being (here their 'relations'), which in Braque's painting is the ground – ground as 'space' but also, perhaps, as the act of painting – the felicitous point of comparison is that in the

[2] Neil Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger on the Way to Poetry', *Angelaki: A Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 12/2 (August 2007): pp. 97–115.

[3] Cox, 'Braque and Heidegger', p. 111.

visual arts Braque was thinking beyond a representational structure that is arguably the conceptual *equivalent* of the one that, in the history of philosophy, Heidegger identified as the error of Western metaphysics.[4]

In discussing this notion of the poetic, or better poeticizing, in Braque's work, there persists in my mind a doubt around the bird representations in the *Studios* and other paintings of his late career. I am troubled by the degree to which these avian intercessors could be considered as consistent with some of the Heideggerean claims I have tried to make for Braque's art. If, as argued in my earlier paper, this art can be viewed in its own way as an interrogation of the question of being, Braque's birds seem to introduce a privileging of creatures as figures of ontological omniscience, something akin to the 'uncanny hominization' that Heidegger uncovered and rejected in the poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke. This chapter is, therefore, an investigation into the nature of Braque's bird representations, a questioning of them in relation to Heidegger's critique of Rilke.

I shall begin by focusing on a very late enterprise in Braque's career, a collaborative publication with the diplomat and prose-poet Alexis Leger (1887–1975), whose pen name was Saint-John Perse. This unusual artist's book, consisting of Perse's text *Birds* and Braque's twelve prints carrying the different title *The Order of the Birds*, was instigated by publishers Francis and Janine Crémieux, and was to be

[4] There are, of course, holes that might be picked in this claim from the perspective of Heidegger's thinking. For example, take two opposing points drawn from the *Parmenides* lectures: Being is not the ground but is groundless (Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington, 1992), p.150), making any reading of the ground in painting as a metaphor for Being problematic. Meanwhile, Heidegger's description of the error of man in the face of beings chimes well with Braque's critical notion that we must resist the European tradition of oil painting with its preoccupation with the surfaces of volumes of objects and attend instead to what is *in-between* them: 'Because only unconcealed beings can appear and do appear in the open of Being, man adheres, at first unwittingly, and then constantly, to these beings.' (Ibid., p.151).

both a celebration of the artist's eightieth birthday and the centrepiece of an exhibition in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, highlighting the dialogue between celebrated poet and painter.[5] Perse, a newly crowned Nobel Laureate, had long before this made birds a motif in his poetry, starting with his poem 'Cohorte' of 1907, and had developed the theme in one of the volumes he published while living in the United States, *Vents* (*Winds*) of 1946. At the point of being asked to collaborate with Braque, he was contemplating a long poem on the subject.[6]

At that first meeting of 1958, Perse recalled seeing on the various easels in Braque's studio a painting of a plough and one of a bird (a studio photograph taken five years later by Mariette Lachaud gives a feel for the kind of scene that greeted Perse (fig. 3.2)). On the easels are a large painting called *In Full Flight* (1956–61), to which I shall return, and *The Large Plough* (1960). Perse also knew, of course, Braque's high profile decorative scheme for the Etruscan rooms of the Musée du Louvre completed in 1954, a major event in French national commissioning that gave a living artist the chance to work in spaces hitherto only dedicated to the presentation of the old masters, decorative arts of the past, and ancient cultural heritage. In Braque's Louvre ceiling canvases, vast schematic birds wheeled abstract shapes

[5] Saint-John Perse, *L'ordre des oiseaux*, with 12 colour etchings by Georges Braque, Paris: Au Vent d'Arles, 1962. For the text see also Perse, *Oiseaux* (Paris, 1963). For an early commentary see Victor Bromery, 'Perse's Avian Order', The Hudson Review, 19/3 (Autumn, 1966): pp. 494–97, and for a discussion of the project in the context of the poet's wider interest in art throughout his career, see Roger Little, 'Saint-John Perse et les arts visuels', *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, Vol.82, No.2, (1986), pp. 220–34, especially p.227–8. Carol Rigolet argues that the inspiration for Perse's text is more about Audobon as Braque (Rigolet, *Forged Genealogies: Saint-John Perse's conversations with culture*, Department of Romance Languages: The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2001, Chapter 11, especially pp.188–90).

[6] See Mechtild Cranston, 'Voice and Vision, Cry Gesture: The Birds of Saint-John Perse' *Symposium*, 32:2 (Summer 1978): pp. 103–13, for more on the 1907 poem.

among weighty decorative mouldings. Braque resorted to comparably simplified forms and strong patterns in the twelve prints that formed the visual dimension of *The Order of the Birds* (fig. 3.3).

The best prints are remarkable for their exploration of the page as a dynamic field, a free space in contrast to the rigours imposed by the presentation of text. Moreover, they are technically astounding: etchings in up to five colours, made with the master printer Aldo Crommelynck, using heavy handmade paper and thick inks. Yet what really marks them out is the degree to which they abandon the natural linearity of etching in favour of blocks of colour, texture, and pattern to the point where they emulate the effects of Braque's own paintings, creating a balance between the birds and the space around them (fig. 3.4).[7]

Perse's hybrid text is part meditation on birds as the most vital of beings, part figuring of poetic vision through the image of the bird in flight, and part reflection on Braque's representations of birds as themselves poetic.[8] Divided into thirteen short sections, the text moves more or less seamlessly between these different strands. In terms of the first theme, birds in their vitality, Perse makes much of the world in which he imagines that birds exist: a world of endless flight, one subject to gravity but defying it, one of an unimaginable dynamism and erotic intensity. Section I establishes Perse's characteristic stance: the lyrical description of birds, bringing them into a relationship, albeit of extreme distance, with the human world: 'Birds, of all our table

[7] See Jennifer Mundy, *Georges Braque: Printmaker* (London, 1993), p. 32. For more on the technical aspects of the project see Dora Vallier, *Braque: The Complete Graphics, Catalogue Raisonné*, (trans.) Robert Bononno and Pamela Barr (New York/ London, 1988), p. 255.

[8] Its hybridity has been the cause of its limited critical reception: see Shushi Kao, 'Une Poétique des Figures: Oiseaux de Saint-John Perse', *Neophilologus*, 69:3 (July 1985), pp. 352–64, especially p. 352.

companions the hungriest for life, nourish their rage with a secret fever in the veins; theirs is the grace of body heat'.[9]

From a Heideggerean perspective, and for reasons that will become apparent below, this is already perhaps a poetry that stands in need of the test of thought. If so it is in Section X, in particular, where the questioning must begin, for here Perse attributes to birds a special relationship to what Heidegger's translators capitalize as Being: 'Midway between earth and sky, the upstream and downstream of eternity, precursors marking out an eternal course, they are our intermediaries, straining with all their being to the farthest reach of being'.[10] The assertion that birds might have some privileged relationship to ontological truths is, Heidegger would think, deeply problematic. Nevertheless, before exposing this claim to the criticisms that Heidegger makes of Rilke, it is important to note that one of the challenges in reading Perse's text is to be sensitive to the movement back and forth between Perse's own encomia to birds and his approaches to Braque's bird representations. The passage from one to the other is often marked out after the fact, so that in the extract from Section X just cited, which reads as a philosophical claim about the proximity of birds to Being, it becomes apparent in the beginning of the following section that the topic all along was probably the birds depicted in Braque's art. There is a clue to this a few sentences before in section X: 'The farther they glide the more fully they know the joy of being, these birds with their ancient history and aspiration, their heads like dolphins or new-born children'.[11] The dolphin and infant heads are, I think, ways of addressing the extreme abstraction of some of the creatures in Braque's prints for the volume.[12]

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[9] Saint-John Perse, *Birds*, (trans.) Robert Fitzgerald, with four colour etchings by Georges Braque (New York, 1966), also translated as *Birds*, (trans.) Derek Mahon (Loughcrew, Co. Meath, 2002), p. 11.

[10] Ibid., p. 27.

[11] Ibid., p. 26.

Of course, the fact that the poetic imagination may be playing upon represented rather than real birds, that Perse might be inspired to find ontological truths in the strange forms of Braque's prints, might only reinforce the problem that was my point of departure. The poet's lyric voice may have over-reached itself as metaphysics *because* Braque's own avian visualizations are equally prone to the same error. Perse's nearly imperceptible shifting from one register to another, from the discussion of the birds of natural science to those of art, from those of the poets to those of the Ornithological Station at the Camargue on the coast of Provence repeatedly associates the 'joy of being' with Braque's ornithology. Furthermore, I think it would be fair to say that many of Braque's bird paintings of the mid-1950s onwards, ones like *The Nest in the Foliage* (1958) that emerged, so to speak, out of the Studio series, attest to a mystical contemplation of avian life-worlds. The question is whether or not Braque makes the bird into a figure whose relation to Being is *superior* to any such human relationship.

In order to think through this claim, I now want to attend more closely to the terms of Heidegger's critique of Rilke. Heidegger discussed the key text, Rilke's 'Eighth Elegy', published as one of the ten *Duino Elegies* in 1923, on a number of occasions. His approach to the poem was, as many have noted, a development of the ontological distinctions he had drawn between different kinds of beings in his lecture course *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* of 1929–30. In this formidable work, Heidegger explored a tri-partite definition of beings: a stone is treated as 'worldless', an animal as 'poor in world', and human beings as 'World-forming'.[13]

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[12] And their 'ancient history' now makes sense as the ancient history of bird representations listed by Perse elsewhere; inheritance from Persian and Egyptian sculpture, from the Qu'ran, from Audobon.

[13] Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington/Indianapolis, 1995), p. 177.

Most of the argument is focused on defining what, for the animal, 'poverty in world' might mean, and broadly speaking Heidegger defines this in terms of an instinctual 'captivation', a set of relationships to things in the environment of the animal, its circle of activity, where there is no possibility of relating to beings as beings, but merely of being open to being taken, or 'captured', by them. This being open is contrasted with the openness of human beings to beings *as* beings, where beings are not merely open but open-able, unconcealed beings.[14] If the stone has no possibility of any kind of opening to other beings, the animal is open to captivation by beings but at the same time deprived of having a world where beings could be revealed to it.

Heidegger takes up this sense of an unbridgeable gulf between animal and human being in his first sustained discussion of Rilke's 'Elegy', at the very end of his *Parmenides* lecture course of 1942–3. His objective here is to define the word 'open' for his own purposes, as a way of thinking Being as the groundlessness out of which all grounds must appear. 'The open,' he writes, 'to which every being is liberated as if to its freedom, is Being itself. Every thing unconcealed is as such secured in the open of being, i.e. in the groundless'.[15] Crucially, this open is a bestowal upon man, as the being who can acknowledge unconcealedness as the truth of Being; only man can see the open, even if, historically, that seeing is often forgotten or lost, hidden behind the plethora of beings. It is against this set of pronouncements that Heidegger takes Rilke to task.[16] A reading of the first lines of the 'Eighth Elegy' will make the problem obvious:

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[14] Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, (trans.) Keith Attell, (Stanford, 2004), p. 55.

[15] Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p. 150.

[16] Most commentators on Heidegger's engagement with Rilke focus on the stringent critique of the *Parmenides* course. But there is a further, much more lengthy and in my view much more balanced discussion of Rilke's notion of 'the Open' and his understanding of the situation of man in modernity, in the 1946 occasional essay 'Why

With all its eyes the creature-world beholds
the Open. But our eyes, as though reversed,
encircle it on every side, like traps
set round its unobstructed path to freedom.
What *is* outside, we know from the brute's face
alone; for while a child's quite small we take it
and turn it around and force it to look backwards
at conformation, not that openness
so deep within the brute's face. Free from death.
We alone see *that*; the free animal
has its decease perpetually behind it
and God in front, and when it moves, it moves
within eternity, like running springs.
We've never, no, not for one single day,
pure space before us, such as that which flowers
endlessly open into: always world,
and never nowhere without the no...[17]

Rilke sees creatures, the animal, as closer than man to everything that *is*, to *all* beings, thanks to the existence of the creature in 'the Open', to being so entirely embedded in the wide circle of things as to be one with it. Heidegger glosses what

Poets?' To my mind, there is something extraordinary about Heidegger's way of engaging with poetry in this piece, an approach that is both remarkably discursive and grounded in close reading. Whereas the Parmenides lectures were unforgiving in their assessment of poetic achievement according to the degree to which a poem can be said to 'attain the mountain height of a historically foundational decision' (*Parmenides*, p.160), poeticising in Rilke is here given its due.

[17] Rilke, 'The Eighth Elegy', *The Duino Elegies*, trans. J. B. Leishman and Stephen Spender, (London, 1963) [Fourth Edition], p.77. I have capitalised the 'O' of Open in this translation, for consistency with other translations and for clarity in relation to Heidegger's term.

Rilke means by the Open as '…the limitless, the infinite, wherein living beings breath and unrestrainedly dissolve into the irresistible causal nexuses of nature, in order to float within this infinity'.[18] As we now know, for Heidegger, by contrast, only human beings could ever grasp the open, since only in a rich form of world, and with the bestowal of language, would it be possible to grasp beings *as* beings, and thus to ask the question of Being at all, to be struck by Being. Heidegger insists that animal seeing cannot be construed as a seeing of the open of Being. He explains:

> Plant and animal are suspended in something outside themselves without ever being able to 'see' either the outside or the inside. And never would it be possible for a stone, no more than for an airplane, to elevate itself toward the sun in jubilation and to move like a lark, which nevertheless does not see the open.[19]

To return to Perse, I think it is plausible to see strong parallels between his meditation on birds in *L'Ordre des oiseaux* and Rilke's vision of the animal as freely gazing into the Open, contrasted in both their poetics with the closing off of the Open to human eyes. Take, for example, the following from Perse's Section XIII:

> Together with everything else that wanders the world, adrift on the flow of time, they go where all the world's birds go, to the fate of all earthly creatures; to surge where everything goes, the celestial circuits themselves, that immense heave of life and creation which moves the spring night to its depths, rounding more capes than our dreams can erect; and so vanish, leaving us to the ocean of things free and unfree.[20]

This ocean of things that are visible to us is a mere residue, Perse implies, compared to the infinite of the bird's temporal immersion. And again, some of Braque's works of the same period, such as the painting *In Full Flight* (fig. 3.5) showing a jet-like bird, meant by the artist to be seen from above flying over its

[18] Heidegger, *Parmenides*, p.157.

[19] Ibid., p.160.

[20] Perse, (trans.) Mahon, p. 32.

waterborne nest, abstracted to become the black shape on the right, could be thought to express that same infinite celestial notion, that sublimity of avian flight that takes the bird out into Rilke's Open. The bird in *The Bird in its Nest* (fig. 3.6) is captivated in its environment, no doubt; building its nest; tending its eggs; seeking food on the wing.

Another resonance between the two poetic discourses is evident in the attitude that Perse and Rilke take to modernity. The Open contrasts in Rilke's thinking, Heidegger argues, with the modern conception of the instrumental reasoning of man. Beings are ordered, mastered, possessed, and manipulated by modern man, who is the viewing, representing, reasoning subject over against a world thus made up of 'objects'.

> And we: spectators always, everywhere,
> looking at, never out of, everything!
> It fills us. We arrange it. It collapses.
> We re-arrange it, and collapse ourselves.[21]

This representational consciousness is pejoratively named 'metaphysics' by Heidegger in virtue of its occupation with beings and forgetting of Being. In its substance it posits man as a rational animal, as a calculating, reasoning creature. For Rilke, and here Heidegger agrees, this instrumental reasoning is oblivion. But for Rilke what must be recovered instead by way of healing (but cannot be by way of representational consciousness) is man's *animal* relationship to the Open. Rilke therefore argues instead for a different consciousness, one founded in a poetic language that can speak the inner world of the heart. Heidegger views this solution as persisting in metaphysical error, still clinging to the nefarious and fundamentally alienated notion of the human subject in its preoccupation with the inner voice, still trapped in a

[21] Rilke, *The Duino Elegies*, p. 81.

Cartesian view of man as part animal, part reason. This sense of the inner voice of the heart is evident in Perse too: 'Ignoring their own shadows, knowing of death only the immortality implicit in the noise of distant waters, they vanish, they leave us, their lonely thoughts traversing space, and we are changed forever.'[22] Rilke's animals, too, know nothing of death ('Only we see *that'*). And like Rilke's man, turned back on beings as objects, arranging and rearranging them and his own self, Perse's human observers are left to an ocean of things. Crucially, though, and again this chimes with Rilke, Perse is somehow changed or elated by the flight of the bird into infinite openness. We hear an echo of Rilke's lyrical exhortation: 'You must change your life!'[23]

Heidegger may have condemned Rilke as the poetic counterpart of Nietzsche – both announcing and enacting the dénouement of Western metaphysical thinking – but he also lauded Rilke's attention to the saving power of poetic language, this interrogation of poetry within poetry as a means to finding again what, according to Heidegger, Rilke wrongly thought as the limitless freedom of the Open. At least, he argued, Rilke grasped that language was the space in which the Open could be said anew. Perse's voice is also lyrical in this way, a surging or saying of the inner world of the subject confronted by the Rilkean Open of the creature. Again, such saying points to a need for the thinking of beings *as* beings, even if it cannot do this work itself. Might this poetic saying, then, be an approach to Braque's birds?

Poetry is making in language, but of course when we turn to Braque's painterly prints we deal with depiction. So, if a critical analogy is to work we need to consider

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[22] Perse, (trans.) Mahon, p. 32.

[23] This is the last line of Rilke's well-known poem 'Archaic Torso of Apollo'. For a brilliant discussion of the heterodox nature of Rilke's writing see Michael Wood, 'His affairs with women were intense, literary and dominated by the word "soul"', *London Review of Books*, vol.18, no.16, pp. 8–9.

whether there could be a Heideggerean approach to the ‘interrogation of painting within painting’ that is also a staging of the question of the Open, and therefore a route to thinking about their ‘ontological difference’, at a time when modernity threatens its oblivion. Certainly, that there could be an analogous approach in terms of Heideggerean critique is made plausible thanks to Braque’s notion of his art as fundamentally *poetic*, though it remains to consider the particular character of painting’s ‘saying’.

To put the point another way, what, in *The Bird in its Nest*, are to we to make of Braque’s means? Here the free Open of flight is dense, clotted, and dark. If the project of speaking the ‘inner voice of the heart’ *is* a way of thinking Braque’s animal representations, then what voice is he inviting us to hear when he transforms the studio bird into this captivated but mystical creature?

Around the time of the publication of *L’Ordre des oiseaux*, Braque described his 1955 visit to the Camargue in terms that demonstrate that we should not make a literal equation between the visions in his prints and Perse’s later poetic metaphysics, but which do provide a conception of ‘poetic saying’ in painting. Braque describes the impact of seeing cranes, pelicans or flamingos in flight:

> One summer, a few years ago, I was in the Camargue. I saw some huge birds flying above the waters. From that vision I derived aerial forms. Birds have inspired me, and I try to make the best use of them that I can in my paintings. While they interest me as living animal species, I have to bury in my memory their natural functions as birds. This concept, even after the shock of inspiration which has brought them to life in my mind, must be deleted, so that I can draw closer to my essential preoccupation: the construction of pictorial fact. Painting alone must

> impose its presence on what relates to it, and metamorphose it afresh; everything that goes to make up the picture must be integrated in this presence, and must efface itself before it.[24]

The artist insists here on the precedence of pictorial making over the surprise afforded by the sight of birds in the wild. If Perse is right to see in Braque's birds freed into painting an image of 'the joy of being', according to the artist the metamorphosis that he effects must be understood as the making present in painting of the 'shock of inspiration' that aerial forms, flying birds, first gave. In this case, although birds are figured in prints and paintings, their now schematic forms in flight are intended to act as the key to a fundamentally modernist concept, the vectors of pictorial space, rather in the way that Constantin Brancusi's extraordinary *Bird in Space* (1923) had done for sculptural space. Both Braque and Brancusi are modernists because they are doing exactly what Heidegger thinks Rilke was doing in his poetic saying: interrogating their means through those very means. Heidegger inflects for us what could seem an arid formalism, of the kind normally associated with the later writings of Clement Greenberg, with the deepest existential questions that face humanity in modernity: what kind of relationship to our world can we have in the era of advanced technology?

Very late in life, in 1970 or so, Heidegger took to writing somewhat indigestible poems of his own, including one on the subject of Cézanne, an artist whose work he held particularly dear. This poem contains a peculiar trap for interpretation:

> In the late work of the painter the twofoldness of what is present and of presence has become one, 'realized' and overcome at the same time, transformed into a mystery filled identity.[25]

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[24] Braque, cited by Jacques Damase in 1963, Quoted in Mundy, p. 32. Braque visited the Ornithological Park in The Camargue on 20 May 1955 (see *Les Oiseaux et l'oeuvre de Saint-John Perse*, (exh. cat.) Hôtel de Ville, Aix-en-Provence and Musée Jacquemart-André, Paris, 19 June 1976–January 1977), p. 127.

[25] Cited in Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 152. I am very grateful to my Essex colleague and Heidegger specialist Wayne Martin, whose criticisms enabled me to see the problem here.

The trap is, of course, that in terms of Heidegger's whole philosophical project, the notion that one *could* overcome the twofoldness of beings and Being seems wrong-headed. On the contrary, Heidegger insists over and over again in his writings on the need to *attend* to the ontological difference, to grasp that Being is not a being and that presence is a self-withdrawal that makes the positive self-disclosing of beings possible. As if to confirm the oddness, Heidegger explained his poem: he said that what Cézanne's art embodied was 'for thinking, the question of overcoming the ontological difference between Being and beings'.[26]

Unless we attribute this sudden volte-face regarding overcoming of the ontological difference to a lapse of concentration in old age, it seems that we need to attend to the context of the remark more carefully. And I think that doing so will enable us to grasp something of the way Heidegger understood painting and its possibilities judged from the perspective of the questioning of Being. In the same gloss on the poem, Heidegger claims that the oneness 'realized' in Cézanne's works is 'the oneness of the pure radiance of his paintings'.[27] Here Heidegger reveals a particular understanding of Cézanne's art, one based on the notion that in the medium of painting it was possible to construct a procedure where the manifestation of things (of beings) in the representation was so inseparable from the manifestation of the medium itself (Being) that the two things could be said to manifest as a unity, a *pictorial metaphor*, perhaps, for the striking experience of the given-ness of what is present in the clearing

[26] Ibid., p. 153

[27] Ibid.

of presence.[28] The power of the pictorial metaphor is indicated in that other phrase, 'pure radiance'. And here we have to take seriously something new: the late Heidegger's frequent attempts to consider 'mystery-filled identity', the not-yet unconcealed, the unsaid in the unsayable, some oneness prior to even the open of *aletheia*.

It seems possible to see the birds in Braque's *Studio* paintings, such as *Studio II*, (1949) as forms, shapes, woven into the fabric of things and space. The nature of the process of making here is not of course identical to Cézanne's, but it shares in that poetic saying that makes the saying itself the meaning, that allows perhaps for a 'realization and overcoming' of what is otherwise experienced in thinking only as the twofold truth of unconcealedness into pure radiance, a mystery-filled identity.

But would we say the same, or think it plausible to say it, when confronting the birding of the birds of Braque's later aerial fantasies, those to be found in the prints of *L'ordre des oiseaux* and in related paintings such as *The Birds* (1954-6)? Could the rhetoric of a 'mystery-filled identity' here be construed, from Heidegger's position, *merely* as Rilke's Open? And if so, perhaps Braque's thick impasto, his muted surfaces are there to insist on the *painted* saying of the Open, which acknowledges the idea of the *creature*, rather than the questioning of representation through representation, as central to the project of our own renewal in the crisis of modernity.

In this chapter, a fine example of the art book tradition, or that sub-species of it that involves collaboration and inter-medial exchange or dialogue, has been set against the complex argument that Heidegger has with Rilke's poetry. In approaching *Oiseaux/L'ordre des oiseaux* this way, I have taken seriously its subject matter as well

[28] Medium here of course means many things: skeins of materialised colour; the hesitant attending and mark making of the artist; the inheritance of tradition where the relationship to it is constitutive of the meaning of the new procedure.

as its form, and examined where finally we should situate what seems to be, in the last analysis, a shared vaunting of the creaturely over the human, between poet and painter. I cannot say that the question of the validity, or one might say the ethical weight, of the book can be determined. What does seem obvious is that there is a tension between the romantic, even Schopenhaurean elevation of the closeness of creatures to creation and Heidegger's emphatically human perspective. Braque's prints, in their abstraction, draw upon his long apprenticeship as a modernist artist, taking to task the language of pictorial representation through an ever-greater concentration on its forms. His late adoption of the bird motif and increasing focus on its life-world meanwhile suggests that the testing of space and of things is diverted into a symbolic image. Such wheeling birds as those on the ceiling of the Louvre, for all their bold energy, inevitably seem dated, and this fading glory is caused by the redundancy or speciousness of the symbolism. I have argued that it is this weakness that Heidegger's terse rejection of Rilke allows us to grasp.